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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 STATE 077328

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C O R R E C T E D C O P Y - CAPTION ADDED
E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: PHUM IR PREL PGOV KDEM

SUBJECT: DEMARCHE: DETAINED/MISSING AMERICANS IN IRAN

REF: A. STATE 68161

1B. TOKYO 2358

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11. (SBU) SUMMARY: The Department understands that the GOJ has expressed a willingness to raise the case of detained AmCit Kian Tajbakhsh with Iranian officials in Tokyo, but has asked

for a formal request from the USG to do so. Based on the Department's request to raise the case of Dr. Haleh Esfandiari earlier this month (Reftels A, B), FM Aso raised the issue of detained AmCits in general terms only. The Department asks post to request that GOJ officials again reach out to their Iranian counterparts to raise not only Kian Tajbakhsh's detention, but the cases of Haleh Esfandiari, Parnaz Azima, Ali Shakeri and Robert Levinson as well. END SUMMARY.

OBJECTIVES

12. (SBU) Begin Objectives.

-- Thank the GOJ for Foreign Minister Aso having raised the issue of Americans detained in Iran with FM Mottaki.

-- Raise the issue of other AmCits detained or missing in Iran using background points below and provided in Reftel A. Emphasize the high level of interest in these cases within the USG, as evidenced by the June 1 Statement by the President on the Detention of American Citizens by the Iranian Regime (available at www.whitehouse.gov). Stress that these cases represent a disturbing pattern of harassment of innocent citizens.

-- Convey that we believe it is within the power of the Iranian government to assist in returning these individuals to their families.

BACKGROUND

3.(U) Begin Background.

(U) Kian Tajbakhsh is an Iranian-American social scientist and urban planner who works as a consultant for the Open Society Institute. He has worked as a consultant in the areas of local government reform, urban planning and social policy, and has taught at universities in the United States and Iran. On/around May 11, while Tajbakhsh was visiting Iran on personal travel, Iranian authorities arrested and imprisoned him. An Iranian judiciary spokesperson later

announced on May 29 that Tajbakhsh, along with Haleh Esfandiari and Parnaz Azima (see below), had been charged with endangering national security and espionage.

(U) Parnaz "Nazi" Azima is an Iranian-American journalist for Radio Farda based in Prague. Iranian officials confiscated her passports at the Tehran airport on January 25 as she was entering Iran to visit her mother. Azima has not been imprisoned, but she has tried unsuccessfully on several occasions to retrieve her passports from Iranian authorities, who finally summoned her to appear at the Revolutionary Court on May 15. In court, the judge interrogated Azima for four hours, accused her of antiregime propaganda and ordered her to pay a bond of 800,000,000 Iranian Rials. Later, on May 29, a judiciary spokesman also identified Azima, together with Esfandiari and Tajbakhsh as a spy who has been charged with endangering national security and espionage. Azima's lawyer denies that she was ever charged with these crimes. She remains out of prison at her mother's house in Tehran, but is unable to leave Iran.

(U) Ali Shakeri works as a mortgage broker and peace activist in Irvine, California, and is a founding board member of the Center for Citizen Peacebuilding at the University of California at Irvine. He traveled to Iran in March to visit his sick mother (NOTE: Shakeri's mother has since died) and was arrested by Iranian authorities on/around May 8. While the judiciary spokesman who publicly charged Tajbakhsh Esfandiari and Azima with revolutionary actions on May 29 did not identify Shakeri with that group, Shakeri remains in

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prison in Iran without charges.

(U) Robert A. Levinson is a retired FBI Special Agent who traveled to Kish Island, Iran on March 8 on personal travel. Reports indicate that he checked into the Maryam Hotel in Kish Island that day, and that two Iranian officials later escorted him out of his hotel room for "questioning" that evening. Mr. Levinson has not been seen or heard from since.

The USG has sent multiple "Swiss Note" messages to Iran via the Swiss Protecting Power in Tehran, and Levinson's wife, Christine, has spoken directly with Iranian PermRep Zarif at the UN in New York, but so far there had been no additional information about his whereabouts. Levinson has seven children and one grandchild, and recently missed his 33rd wedding anniversary on May 11.

End Background.

POINT OF CONTACT

¶4. (SBU) The POC for this request is Rob McInturff in the Office of Iranian Affairs (202-647-2520).

RICE